IN MEMORIAM

JAMES WILLIAM MOLL

James William Moll was born on April 11, 1916, in Toledo, Ohio, the son of John and Ila Moll. After graduating from Woodward High School he attended the University of Toledo for two years.

Interested in the visual arts he first enrolled as an art major. But he also loved literature; having studied piano for many years, was a devotee of music; and in high school, had begun acting in plays. Theatre, then became his major for it encompassed all three: art, music and literature.

Moll transferred to the University of Michigan as a theatre major. While a student he was hired as an actor in the Ann Arbor Drama Season, a professional company which performed annually in the spring. In 1939 he received his B.A., and in 1940, his M.A.; both from Michigan. In 1951-52, he received a Fulbright Fellowship for advanced study on Elizabethan theatre and staging with Allardyce Nicoll at the Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-on-Avon, England; he returned for an additional summer of study in 1953.

After teaching a year at Port Huron (Michigan) High School, he joined the Department of Drama faculty at The University of Texas at Austin in 1941. During that first year in Austin he married the former June Madison of Muskegon, Michigan. In 1942 he was inducted into the U.S. Army and for three years served in the infantry in Italy.
He was discharged in 1945, and along with his wife, June, he joined Margo Jones in Dallas to help her create Theatre 45 and Theatre 46, one of the first regional resident theatre companies in the U.S. In the fall of 1946 he returned to the Department of Drama as a teacher of acting and directing and a director. In his 37 years of teaching at the University he developed and eventually headed the acting program and directed more than 75 productions. He retired in 1978 and was named Professor Emeritus.

A sensitive, perceptive teacher, Moll guided and shaped the acting talents of hundreds of aspiring actors. He gave unstintingly of himself as he taught and directed, created and headed the acting program, served on various University committees, was the faculty sponsor of the Curtain Club from 1946 to 1955 and chaired the Department of Drama in 1952-53 when Chairman F. Loren Winship was recalled to active military duty. Because of his steadfast sense of responsibility and loyalty to the University Moll relinquished a second year to study as a Fulbright Fellow at Stratfordon-Avon to lead the Department in Winship's absence.

Teaching for James Moll was a privileged profession in which one had the challenging opportunity of guiding students into discovering the best in themselves as theatre artists and human beings so that they could face the unexpected in life with resilience, enthusiasm and whenever possible, joy. He was particularly interested in learning about how others were training young actors and directors; and he was also willing and eager to share his own conclusions on the subject. He made several trips abroad to investigate theatre schools and professional theatres in England, France, Scandinavia, Germany, the U.S.S.R., Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and Greece. An active member of the American Educational Theatre Association for a number of years, Moll presented papers on acting and directing at the national conventions.
His dozens of productions at the University were enriched by his thorough research in preparation, his willingness to share the creative process with the students and faculty colleagues and his enormous respect for the great literature of the theatre. A modest man, who directed a wide range of materials from contemporary and classic plays to musicals and operas with ease, he considered his work a conduit through which the words and intent of the playwrights and composers were given to others. When a production was a success, it was to the credit of Shakespeare, Shaw, Puccini, Euripides, Styne and Sondheim, Albee, Chekov, Purcell or Ibsen.

With Moll's acceptance of an invitation to direct at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland in 1965, directing in professional repertory companies became an increasingly important aspect of his career and later he became a member of the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers. In these situations in which his casts included college students, actors just beginning their careers and experienced professionals, his confidence in them, kindness and secure sense of the style of each production created an atmosphere in which the many talents and levels of experience coalesced into a satisfying whole which was often critically acclaimed. For example, two of his Shaw productions in 1983 were hailed by the theatre critic of the San Francisco Examiner:

The presiding genius at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival this year is James Moll, who directed Man and Superman and Don Juan in Hell. If Moll does not love George Bernard Shaw dearly and respect him deeply, the sun does not rise in the East.
In a 1984 interview about directing which was done for a publication of the Intiman Theatre in Seattle, Moll explained his approach to a play:

"When I direct any play, I look for the simple, human thoughts, feelings and actions involved...roles aren't just patched onto life, but emerge from what the playwright has lived, learned, and felt."

Not only did Moll research the playwright's life and times but when relevant he learned all he could about the lives of the people on whom the characters were based.

"During rehearsals, the outside world ceases to exist for me....I immerse myself. I feel for the pulse, the real breathing of real people...to uncover what motivates those characters, to follow those motives, and to notice how other characters let the motives come out."

The language in the play was of prime importance in a Moll production. Above all he wanted the audiences to hear, understand, and savor every line and nuance of meaning in the script.

"A play speaks to the audience with words...the actions of actors complement the words harvested from experiences of life."

He particularly enjoyed the process of collaboration with actors and designers so necessary in directing a play.
"I find it exciting to come into a situation where I don't know people. When rehearsals start, the collaborative experience establishes a relationship. It is a pleasure for me to know the human beings who are the actors."

He was also pleased to know and work with designers as together with them he approached each play as a fresh, new experience whether he had seen it many times or had already directed it. As the designs became reality on the stage and the actors brought the characters to life, Moll's enthusiasm for the exciting collaborative process was inspiring and reassuring to his creative partners.

The catalog of the productions he directed for five repertory companies encompasses much of the best of familiar theatre literature:

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- The King and I 1969
- Man of La Mancha 1969
- Fiddler on the Roof 1971
- My Fair Lady 1972
- Most Happy Fella 1973
- The Visit 1974
- Guys and Dolls 1975
- Romeo and Juliet 1976
- Man of La Mancha 1977
- Paint Your Wagon 1978
- A View from...Bridge 1978
- The Front Page 1979
- You Never Can Tell 1980
- Golden Boy 1981
- Hedda Gabler 1981
- Terra Nova 1982
- The Country Girl 1983
- Misalliance 1984

- Much Ado About Nothing 1965
- The Little Foxes 1976
- Born Yesterday 1979
- The Philadelphia Story 1980
- Wings 1982
- Man and Superman 1983
- Don Juan in Hell 1983
- Hay Fever 1984
- Crimes of the Heart 1985
DENVER CENTER THEATRE COMPANY

They Knew What They Wanted 1984
Pygmalion 1985

INTIMAN THEATRE COMPANY

Hobson's Choice 1984
You Never Can Tell 1985

BERKELEY REPERTORY COMPANY

The Cherry Orchard 1981

In 1978 the staff of Pacific Conservatory of the Performing Arts in California dedicated a season of plays to Moll to mark his retirement from The University of Texas and to celebrate his tenth summer with them. The program note read in part:

His sensitivity, creativity and personal artistic standards have enriched all who have shared his carefully prepared productions which are always marked by a sincere love of humanity...In these ten years, hundreds of California students have been added to the thousands of Texas students whose artistic lives have been enriched by experiencing a James Moll Production.
The James W. Moll Endowed Scholarship in Drama was established in 1984 in his honor by Drama Ex-students and friends of the Department of Drama. The scholarships generated by the fund are awarded to outstanding acting majors.

On December 22, 1986, James Moll died after an extended struggle with cancer and is survived by his wife, June, and a sister, Dorothy Fulmer, of Toledo, Ohio. Among those who participated in his memorial service were Mouzon Law, former director of the School of Theatre Arts at Boston University; Richard Hay, designer at both the Denver Center Theatre Company and the Oregon Shakespeare Festival; Randal Myler, director and playwright; Michael Winters, actor; Mark Harelk, actor and playwright; and Donovan Marley, artistic director; all of the Denver Center Theatre Company. Statements were read from Elizabeth Huddle, artistic director of the Intiman Theatre in Seattle, and Jerry Turner, artistic director of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland.

In celebration of James Moll’s life in the theatre, the staff of the Denver Center Theatre Company dedicated their 1987 February/March productions to his memory. The last paragraph of the statement in the program reads:

His integrity, passion and gentle wisdom touched thousands of young artists during his distinguished career. He was mentor, colleague and friend to many of the most important artists in our company. We shall miss him greatly.
Jerry Turner of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival also paid Moll special tribute. His message is included in their souvenir program for the 1987 winter/spring productions. It reads as follows:

James William Moll was always associated in our minds with the University of Texas, which, over several decades, had sent so many actors, directors, and technicians to the Festival. But he was as much, or more, a product of the University of Michigan. His gentle, nurturing influence was felt here through his students long before he himself arrived to make a direct contribution.

In all, he directed nine productions for the Festival. The energy, warmth, intelligence and good will that infused his work left a permanent impression on all who witnessed his productions or collaborated with him. An added awareness for those who knew him well is the recognition that we ourselves changed and bettered in the light of his friendship.

Nothing can compensate for the staggering loss we feel at his death, and we are right to feel a little diminished by his passing. But his joy and dedication, and, most of all, his pursuit of truth are legacies mortality cannot rob from us, nor time erase the memory of his comradeship and grace.
This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Coleman A. Jennings (Chairman), David A. Nancarrow and Paul D. Reinhardt.